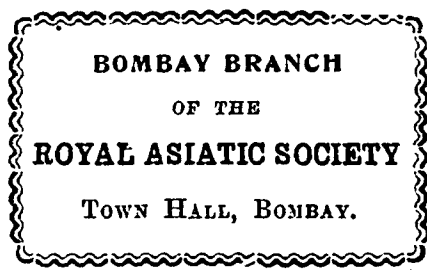


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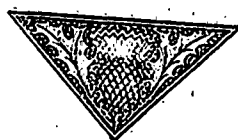
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An Essay on Nothing.



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ESSAY ON NOTHING.

A Discourse Delivered in a Society.

Reprinted from the Edition of 1777



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E. & G. GOLDSMID, GRANTON ROAD.

1886.

PREFACE.



ACKNOWLEDGE, without affectation, that I think this child, whom I am about to usher into the world, well made, handsome, and sprightly. I am sensible, however, of the blindness and fond partiality of a father, and that the public alone are proper judges of his merit ; lest, therefore, it should be discovered that my favourite child is lame and deformed, my parental affection has furnished him with a couple of stilts, to enable him to hobble through the world with tolerable grace.

These stilts are a Preface and Dedication ; I reflected, that a discourse without a preface is like a session of Parliament without a speech from the Throne, a funeral without mourners, a sermon without a text, a dinner without a grace, a bumper without a toast, and what comes still nearer our purpose, a play without a prologue.

I have considered the motives which induce authors to put prefaces to their works ; they are, I apprehend, as follows : An intention to spin out the performance, an apology for its length, or an explanation of the Author's views, in giving his work to the public. These views are on every occasion the most candid and liberal imaginable, without desire of recompense, or gratification of vanity, without hope of preferment, or ambition of applause ; the author, merely from an inclination to promote some public benefit, plods over musty volumes, hunts through indexes, spends watchful nights in racking his dull brains, writes, corrects, translates, compiles, alters, expunges, inserts, copies, pilfers, and lies. But, as it may be laid down as a maxim which we should ever have in mind, " That testimonies in our own behalf, when unsupported by evidence, nine times out of ten, are false ; " so authors, in general far from being capable of such exalted motives, are a proud, opinionative, selfish, ignorant, illiberal, thievish, and beggarly race.

It may be expected that I should here explain the motives which induced me to publish the following essay ; but, as I wish to leave something to the

sagacity of the kind and gentle reader, I desire that he will peruse this performance, and, if he shall then be of ^{his} opinion that there were not motives sufficient to induce me to publish it, I make him heartily welcome to damn it to the temple of Cloacina, or the bottomless pit. I also give him liberty to bestow as many curses, and as foul reproach upon me as volubility of tongue can utter, or strength of imagination invent; and to hint with a shrug and a nod of infinite sagacity, that this discourse which he has damned, is a prototype and forerunner of the fate of its author.

I do not communicate this treatise to promote directly piety, morality, meekness, moderation, candour, simplicity, liberality, knowledge, or truth; but indirectly, by attempting to expose and to lash pride, pedantry, violence, persecution, affectation, ignorance, impudence, absurdity, falsehood, and vice.

Beside the stilts of preface and dedication, I intended to have procured some recommendatory verses, which may be called, "Passports for begging civility and favour from the Christian reader." But, as I know no person living (at least in the British realms) who is endued with any share of poetic fire,

and besides am persuaded, if there were any such, none of them would be so fool-hardy as to recommend this performance, I hope, instead of these, the reader will accept the following verses written in praise of this performance by myself. This practice, I assure him, has by no means novelty to recommend it, although it has not hitherto been openly avowed,

Three sages in three learned ages born,
Three different polish'd stages did adorn ;
In dreams and prophesies the first excell'd ;
With pies and tarts the next his pages swell'd ;
His high dress'd dishes prais'd in loud bombast ;
But I, IN NOTHING, have them all surpass'd.



TO
THE MOST MIGHTY AND
TREMENDOUS POTENTATE
OBLIVION,

Who lived and reigned from the earliest ages, and whose
Empire shall continue World without end.

This Essay

Is, with deep Humility, consigned.

DREAD SIR,



ALTHO' for a fleeting period, my fame
may extend itself beyond thy empire ;
yet I am daily and hourly drawing
nearer thine awful presence. Suffer
me to prostrate myself and my work before thee
with veneration, accompanied with horror, and to

explain with a sincerity to which royal ears are unaccustomed, the motives of this extraordinary address.

If then thy awful Majesty will spare truth and honesty, although professing to hold thee in abhorrence, know that I adore thee for the same reason that many people worship false gods ; not from love, but from fear.

As the prospect of approaching death inspires religious sentiments into the breast of the devotee ; so the dread of sudden death, and perhaps of damnation also to my works, inspires me with the most devout intreaties, that thou wouldest spare thy people. But, if oblivion be the only Elysium I can hope for, mayest thou address me in words such as these :

“ Serus in coelum redeas ; diuque
Laetus intersis populo Quirini.”

The extending my fame will enlarge thy empire ; for, if I am widely exempted from thy jurisdiction, the more glorious will be thy late, yet certain victory. Even Homer, Alexander, and Mahommed, shall bow beneath thine iron hand.

To trace thine origin is difficult, to enumerate thine allies disgraceful, to celebrate thy victories impossible. In room of these, suffer me, Dread Sir, to describe a vision which made me shudder at thy terrific presence.

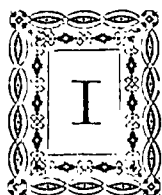
Veiled in a dark robe, thy huge unmeasurable shape floated before me ; I could not ascertain the distance between thee and thy surrounding objects ; if I varied my position in the least, from thinking thee at a vast distance, I beheld thee close at hand. Mists hovered round thy hoary head, and falling in gentle dew on the children of sorrow, soothed their corroding cares, and bitter anguish. Thy mouth opened ; I expected that a loud voice would have burst the vault of heaven ; but the most still and awful silence reigned. A swarm of moths issued from thy mouth, and left neither green herb in the field, nor sumptuous array, the emblem of ancient royalty, in the wardrobe. Worms issued from thy loins, and yawning graves surrounded thy dismal temple. Thy right hand wielded a horrid scythe, thy left held a shaggy sponge, and, aiming at universal empire, thine ample foot crushed innumerable ages and worlds ; equally regardless, thou

trampledst upon thrones, and upon altars. An innumerable host, the engines of thy conquests, were assembled around thee, and I could read on their banners in a legible, though confused character, IGNORANCE, WEAKNESS, SLEEP, MORTALITY, DRUNKENNESS, and ENVY. Thou and thy host were drawn up in battle array, ye marched to encounter a terrible foe. Immortality, Memory, and Hope, with strong presages of victory, led forth their joyful troops to extinguish thy gloomy reign. My heart throbbed with the warmest expectations; but the shouts of contending hosts, and the thick smoke of battle, dispelled the vision.

I shall make no apology for disturbing thy sacred repose, as I am persuaded that the public opinion will entirely concur with mine in the propriety of dedicating this performance to OBLIVION.



An Essay on Nothing.



HAVE chosen for our entertainment a subject of great importance, a field so wide that it has been thought by many to comprehend all nature ; but, like most interesting subjects, the opinions of philosophers have by no means been consistent and uniform concerning it.

This I reckon a considerable advantage, and it truly was an urgent motive, inducing me to entertain all profound readers with my notions upon it, as I thereby shall have occasion to display my ingenuity in supporting that side of the question which I shall choose to embrace ; or, perhaps, following the laudable example set me by those learned gentlemen, who, finding one side of the question too narrow for their unbounded genius, or who, being perplexed by the natural confusion and obscurity of their own ideas, are uncertain to which side the

preference should be given, I shall, with all the accuracy and ingenuity of which I am possessed, at the same time, with great humility, submit to you the arguments on both sides of the question. Arguments so delicately poised, so equally balanced, as to leave you like a flock of asses, incapable of forming any judgment on the matter, or of determining which side of the question is entitled to preference.

Yet, I confess, there is nothing I dread more, than to leave you in a state of such listless apathy and uncertainty. Rather would I inflame you to such virulent altercation among yourselves, and against each other, that the proper object of your resentment may escape ; like an arch-traitor who escapes with life and fortune by a lucky quarrel arising between the houses of Lords and Commons. For, if I mistake not, before I shall bring this treatise to a conclusion, I shall have acquired the resentment, indignation, or contempt of every individual reader.

I shall begin by giving the opinions of different philosophers concerning it. Almost all authors hold, that my subject comprehends and embraces all nature ; yet among this sect a very dangerous schism has sprung up, since those philosophers, who are

presently established as orthodox by the public laws of the state, hold that my subject is the womb of all nature ; whereas those, who, for these many centuries, have been reputed heterodox, maintain, that it is the grave in which all nature shall be eternally buried and extinguished ; or, in the words of Pliny, “ The last and eternal night, which shall destroy both the Gods and the world together.” The former, asserting that all things were made out of NOTHING ; the latter that all things shall turn into NOTHING ; and, like the baseless fabrick of a vision, leave not a rack behind.

Ye who are so minutely acquainted with the writings of philosophers, who, like the industrious bee, have laboured through the works of science, and extracted knowledge from every page, know well what opposite and contradictory tenets are maintained by those venerable sages ; therefore, it will not surprise you, that another sect of this illustrious body absolutely deny our existence, and maintain, with head-strong blindness and unparalleled effrontery, that there is no such object or quality existing in nature as that which I have chosen for the subject of my speculation ; that it is

merely a negative quality, or, in other words, what is meant to signify an abstract from all positive qualities existing in nature. To use argument with such hardened infidels, would, in my opinion, be as absurd as to attempt to charm the deaf with the harmony of music, or the blind with the beauty of colours. Therefore, I shall leave them, confident in this assertion, that my subject alone (whose existence they deny) can illuminate their understandings or melt their hearts.

Indeed, according to the best of my knowledge, this subject has given birth to more disputes, alterations, and inquiries, than all other questions, moral, physical, religious, political, or literary.

My observations lead me to comprehend the generality of mankind in two classes. Those who are so immured in the flesh, and so attached to corporal enjoyments, that they neither believe the existence, nor, if they did, would relish the enjoyment of any pleasure beyond the gratification of the grosser appetites. And those who, through cold constitution, barren imagination, and no very good heart, heightened by the instillment of preposterous principles, and by a continued habit of affectation,

pretend to undervalue and despise the enjoyments with which bountiful nature has encouraged us to promote the welfare and existence of our species, and, in their stead, have reared up fantastical, extravagant, wire-drawn notions of pleasure, too refined for human appetite, which nowhere exist but in those brains where coldness, darkness, and confusion, wandering, or rather stammering, through a narrow and crazy habitation, have engendered them.

As our affections commonly influence our judgment, I take it that people of the first of these dispositions have ranked themselves with that class of philosophers who hold matter to be the grand and eternal principle in nature; and that our ideas and sensations are nothing more than modifications of matter; for instance, that sympathy and antipathy are attraction and repulsion, obstinacy cohesion, stupidity gravitation, the appetite between the sexes magnetism, passion the principle of inflammability, &c. And those of the last mentioned way of thinking have placed the standard of their faith on spirit alone, have agreed to abolish matter altogether, that it is no more than an union of qualities conceived by the mind, and that the notion of a substratum to

these qualities is quite absurd. So these philosophers, between them, have banished both matter and spirit; and, beside the subject of our present discourse, have left nothing in nature.

The opposite sects, who have thus differed about the empire of Nothing, and debated whether it comprehends matter or spirit, dispute, with equally virulent altercation, about the property of other two immense regions, each of them contending that his favourite territory is exempted from our dominion, but that the other is subjected to our authority; and the terms of heresy, folly, and impiety. are heartily bandied about among them. These vast regions are, Time present, and Time to come; or, to use the more emphatic names of these philosophers, who promise themselves large territories in the last of these mentioned countries, Time and Eternity.

The materialists hold, that it is our business not to be gaping and staring, and deliberating how we are to travel the next stage, and thereby tumble in a ditch, and break our legs by not observing the road that lies immediately before us; more especially, as we are utterly ignorant, what sort of a country this same Eternity is. We know there lies a very

wide ocean between that country and this. We know also, that multitudes of emigrants are daily going thither, who, by the bye, notwithstanding all the hardships they complain of suffering in this poor country, never leave it till their leases are expired.

That, whether it is owing to all the vessels being shipwrecked in the passage, or to the delight which our countrymen take in their new abode, or to their being scalped and roasted by the natives, as is the custom with the savages in America ; it is certain, that not one person has so much as been reported to have returned from it, for these seventeen hundred years, and beyond that period history is dark and fabulous. This has raised so high the insurance of vessels bound for that country, that a cunning old fellow, with a triple crown on his head, and a parcel of keys jingling by his side, who pretends he is nearly related to the King of that country, draws bills payable at sight upon a large premium advanced, by which means, poor ignorant people are cheated out of their money. And, even in those countries, where the old Rogue's tricks are seen through, there is a certain class of people called Priests, who, though they do not absolutely draw bills on that

country, yet assure the emigrants that their word will be taken as better caution than the old Rogues' bills; and, for this good word of theirs, they accordingly are liberally rewarded.

The spiritualists again assert, that the pleasures and vexations of this world, which is another name of the country called Time present, are absolutely below the consideration of a reasonable creature; that they are to be reputed as Nothing; that the sole intention of our being sent into this country was, that being apprentices here, it might be known what sort of journeymen we would make hereafter. Then proceeding to argue in a mathematical manner, they tell us, there are certain data or first principles founded on the most obvious truths, which being granted them, they will, by a close chain of reasoning, demonstrate the truth of their main proposition: That the only postulatum they require is this simple one, That mankind shall continue to live to all eternity; and then it will follow, indisputably, that the longest period on record of our continuance on this stage, does not even bear a jot in the scale of proportion, when compared to eternity: Or, in other words, That time present is Nothing, and that

Eternity should be the perpetual object of our desires and actions.

Having delivered the arguments of these profound philosophers, in support of their different tenets, it is with the utmost submission and deference that I offer my opinion on this point of controversy, as I am extremely unwilling to draw on myself the resentment of either of these furious bodies.

In my notions, then, they are both in the wrong ; for, in the heat of altercation, they have overlooked one region so immense, that it is utterly out of the power of men and angels to describe its extent. Here it will be proper to give my learned readers a small sketch of geography, that they may be the better enabled to determine the value, and adjust the property of these great kingdoms. Let it be remembered then, that Time present consists in actual enjoyment, that Time to come is centered in hope, and that Time past is lodged in the memory. Now, this country called Memory is frequently obscured with mists, especially after storms of passion, which totally eclipse the prospect of Time past ; and the warm altercation of these philosophers had raised such a mist in the atmosphere of

Memory as altogether obstructed their view of that country.

That Time past is a part of our subject, is a shadow, is Nothing, appears to me so evident as to require no proof to convince you of it: That Time present is somewhat different, is on some occasions much better, and on other occasions greatly worse than Nothing, appears equally evident. As for time to come, it may, or it may not, be Nothing, just as we come to it. All I shall say on this head is, we know how we are, we know not how we may be; and possession is better than expectation.

I am extremely happy, that, besides those grand, important, and solemn objects which I have already shewn to be a part of our subject, I can also include those trifling, airy, and unsubstantial beings called Words, which are universally allowed to be Nothing, even to a common proverbial simile, "That words are but wind;" for we can only compare things to such objects furnished by nature as bear the strongest analogy and resemblance to those with which they are compared. Accordingly, when a person hearing or reading those magazines of words, entitled Sermons, pleadings, discourses, newspapers, pam-

phlets, dissertations, treatises, inquiries, criticisms, &c. is asked what they contain, he generally gives for answer, "Nothing at all;" yet the fertility of modern genius, incited by the most illiberal and avaricious motives, claimed boldly an exclusive property in those airy unsubstantial beings; and supported that claim by a strange diffuse jargon of metaphysical nonsense.

I embrace, with great pleasure, this opportunity of appeasing the persons who advanced this claim, by rectifying an unlucky and most erroneous opinion which they formed, "That their claim was despised, and rejected by the supreme court of justice;" whereas, in fact, they obtained what they asked; for, as they craved a property in words, and, as words are Nothing, Nothing was accordingly granted them.

My subject also comprehends a certain ingredient called Falsehood, which bears so large a proportion in every composition invented by the mind of man, that it is universally allowed to include in it all religions but one, and to find out that blessed one, has been an object of the most obstinate, violent, and bloody contention; and, after all the noise and bustle that has been made about it, it is twenty

thousand to one against any religion that has ever been professed or established on the face of the earth. It also includes a great part of philosophy, history, travels, narratives, assertions, and declarations, especially if confirmed upon oath. Falsehood has been equally prevalent in historical composition, whether it has represented facts, or ascribed motives inducing to the action of its personages, or bestowed profuse encomiums on the moderation of an upstart sect, who, with every mark of violence, that zealous fury could inspire into bigotted minds, dethroned and expelled their sovereign, violently attempted to murder, their next sovereign, while sitting in the supreme court of justice, countenanced the actual murder of their third, and banished their fourth succeeding sovereign ; laid in ashes every edifice sacred to God ; edifices, which, supposing them destitute of all reverence to the Deity, yet might have claimed respect as monuments of the antiquity and grandeur of their country, and of its loftiness in architecture.

That falsehood is truly Nothing, will appear evident without argument, upon my substituting a synonymous term in its place, to wit, FICTION, or, as

the Houyhnhnms, who had no word in their language to signify falsehood, expressed themselves, "That which is not."

Having proved the non-existence of Matter and Spirit, Time and Eternity, and other important objects, I shall point out a few of the beneficial consequences resulting from these grand discoveries. It will be productive of peace and harmony between those great powers of the Mind, Imagination and Reason; by finishing all dispute about the infinite extension and divisibility of matter, which reason holds to be demonstrably true, but of which imagination rejects and abhors even the idea. It will also diminish the labour of those useful and respectable members of Society called Metaphysicians, in whose praise I can never sufficiently speak, by removing a wide field of inquiry, which they have long cultivated with unwearied labour and most refined subtilty; namely, "how Matter and Spirit act upon each other;" an enquiry altogether superfluous, now that I have shown there are no such objects in existence. Further, it will save future Kings and Emperors, when composing a code of laws, the trouble of inserting a title, "De hæretico

comburendo," and of prohibiting the perusal of such essays as this, "*Quae non per omnia ac præcise congruentes expositæ orthodoxæ fidei,*" by the following sanction, "*His qui talia scripta aut tales libros habere, aut legere sustinuerint, ultimum supplicium experturis.*" It will silence all disputes about the thirty-nine Articles. But, what gives me inexpressible joy, (being a zealous protestant), it will abolish the inquisition. Not to make account of the many millions of lives it will save, by preventing crusades, conspiracies, and massacres, in favour of religious controversy.

It is by no means surprising that this our subject, which I have shewn to comprehend almost all nature, should be the object of general pursuit. So pliant is our subject; so various are its charms, that it has engaged the affections of innumerable votaries of the most opposite characters. The idle, the industrious, the hermit, the libertine, the prodigal, and the miser pursue with equal ardour. Not, indeed, in its natural colours, for these are dark, gloomy, and disconsolate; but under the various and artful disguises which it has assumed.

It is the study of a life-time, to determine between

things and their appearances, between Something and Nothing; for there are so many enchanting disguises covering Nothing, that infinite numbers have been deceived, and have pursued the bubble till they landed in utter ruin. Daily experience testifies how apt we are to be misled by appearances, and mistaken in our notions. Objects truly valuable in themselves are frequently shaded by an external appearance, that by no means prejudices us in their favour. To confirm this, I might bring instances of men of profound judgment, and conscious integrity, who, from timidity and awkwardness, seem to be fools; of virtues, which, from the high degree of restraint and self-denial requisite for exercising them, appear odious and disgusting; of exquisite dishes, which, from their homely appearance, promise but coarse fare; of the most brilliant gems, which, from their rough coats, seem to be worthless pebbles. Innumerable instances of this abound in the animal, intellectual, and moral world.

Now, those objects and qualities, which are of themselves most despicable and hateful, assume the semblance of their correspondent virtues, and frequently put on a much more beautiful and enchanting

disguise. Thus prodigality pretends to be generosity; avarice, frugality; hypocrisy, religion; tyranny, the steady exertion of supreme power; anarchy and rebellion, liberty and public spirit.

To be employed about Nothing, or, in other words, to enjoy "*otium cum dignitate*," pleasure and repose uninterrupted by the drudgery of business, is the ultimate object of our keenest pursuits and desires. As pleasure, when personified, is reckoned a woman; so, when Nothing assumes the disguise of pleasure, she puts on the female sex. She is either a whore or a virtuous woman. If a whore, she yields to your first addresses; her charms enervate you with listless indolence; you cannot, for one moment, shake yourself loose of her voluptuous embraces; your time, your person, and your fortune are wasted in her service, till, at last, by an assimilating power, which she possesses, they are converted, or dwindle to Nothing. Gallantry, with this whore, is termed "idleness and dissipation in youth."

But, if a virtuous woman, she is not to be won, but by hard labour; you must toil severely the greatest part of your life, before she will favour you with a smile of approbation; she will not suffer you even to

touch her person ; she puts you on performing the most arduous and dangerous exploits ; as oft as you return, worn with fatigue, and confident of merit, she urges you on to repeated labours ; till, at last, this capricious woman, when premature old age, the fruit of severe labour, has enfeebled and exhausted you, receives you into her embraces with the most eager affection : But, alas ! by this time you are incapable of relishing the charms of your mistress, or wine, love, and joy, which smile in her train. Marriage, with this honourable woman, is termed “A fortune acquired by labour and industry.”

I must likewise observe, that she has been known to take a sudden and early affection for the most deceitful, rapacious, and abandoned of men, and to have bestowed more liberal favours on such miscreants in their youth, than worthy men, who have devoted their whole lives to get her as a companion, have ever been able to obtain.

Our subject demands love and esteem, not only as an amiable mistress, but as a firm and affectionate friend. For, when friends and fortune fail us ; when we are bereft of every possession and enjoyment ; when the fountains of life are exhausted, and the

fluttering spirit quits its mortal frame; when we descend to the dreary abodes of darkness and oblivion, Nothing is our companion and portion for ever. We brought Nothing into the world, we will take Nothing out of it; like a fast friend, it accompanies us through the wide series of eternity.



As a prudent travelling governor, whether he consults the health, instruction, or amusement of his pupils, will be careful not to waste them by very long journies, but will rest at proper stages, where they may "bait their horses, ease and refresh themselves," and recollect what has passed through their observation; so shall I, like a prudent author, sensible that the attention of many of my hearers will be worn out by the insipidity, and that of some of them be disgusted by the harshness of the pages we have travelled through; yet, I hope, even those among you who are most versant in the literary world, will not pretend that we are walking in a beaten track; I say, I shall here make a digression, which is the diversorium that long-winded authors prepare for the refreshment of their jaded readers; a refresh-

ment the more necessary, as our subject is not yet half exhausted. The stage then I put up at, (I mean the subject of digression), is not a very good one; it is not frequented by princes, prelates, or nobles; by the wise, the opulent, or the great; the poor, the dull, and the ignoble are seldom to be found in its precincts. I must confess then, though it has long enjoyed considerable reputation, though its fame has been celebrated by the recommendation of an illustrious sojourner of old, it is very ill frequented, indeed much less so than the world believes; for, like the bucks and bloods who describe exploits in taverns and bawdy houses which they never entered; so many people pretend they have lodged in our inn, and received excellent accomodation, who were never within many degrees of it.

You will readily perceive that this our resting-place is Humility; a very extraordinary one for an author. But it is strongly suggested by the subject of which we are treating; for, what can be more humiliating, than to think that the grand theatre of the universe which surrounds us, the material world which we feel, the spiritual world which we hope for, the endless ages of happiness which we promise ourselves,

are all mere phantom and delusion, in short, are Nothing, or will speedily be converted into it ; that man himself is sprung from Nothing, or from the vilest and most perishable materials, and will speedily be converted into Nothing? I speak not of our bodies, for that they are dust, and that to dust they will return, is most indubitable ; but I speak of that more aetherial part, whose existence consists in perception, and yet which is supposed to exist when perception is obviously extinct.

After having proved that Matter and Spirit, Time past and to come, are all merely Nothing, I cannot help thinking that those gentlemen have little candour, and are rather addicted to cavil, who require any further proof that the Soul both sprung from Nothing, and will speedily end in it. However, to silence such obstinate and conceited people, I shall here proceed to show that the soul is vegetable, by authorities and quotations, rather than by arguments.

First, then, the great Christian Poet tells us :

——— Flow'rs, and their fruit,
Man's nourishment, by gradual scale sublim'd,
To vital sp'rits aspire, to animal,
'To intellectual : give both life and sense,

Fancy and understanding ; whence the soul
Reason receives, and reason is her being.

A Poet, who is allowed above all others to be most intimately acquainted with human nature, gives the following account of it :

This is the state of man ; to-day puts forth
The tender leaves of hope, to-morrow blossoms,
And bears his blushing honours thick upon him ;
The third day comes a frost, a killing frost ;
And when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
His greatness is a ripening, nips his root.

The Psalmist, speaking of a good man, and conscious of his vegetable origin, says, “ He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season ; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doth shall prosper. As for man, his days are as grass, as a flower of the field so he flourisheth, for the wind passeth over it, and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more.” The prophet Isaiah, speaking of the vengeance of God against the Assyrians, says, “ And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his holy one for a flame : And it shall burn and devour his thorns and briars in one day ; and shall consume the glory of his forest, and of his fruitful field, both

soul and body." And we are told by the Apostle, when speaking of mankind, that "The axe is laid to the root of the tree; therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire." It is certainly on account of our being trees, that fire is prepared to consume the stem of the wicked.

As an undeniable proof, that the talents and ideas of our mind are acquired merely by eating vegetables, our most holy religion assures us, that knowledge grew on a sort of apple-tree, of which our mother ate; and therefore we shall all be damned. However dangerous that tree might have been in days of yore, whatever temptations it might have given to our forefathers; yet, I cannot help thinking that their posterity might have been trusted with it, in all manner of safety; for, if by knowlegde is meant useful knowledge, and a really solid and just way of thinking, it appears that the generality of people, with whom I have had the honour to be acquainted, are so directly the reverse of our common mother, that they would rather be damned than they would learn any thing, or be at the pains to acquire any ideas or principles distinct from trash and nonsense.

I can only account for this strange reverse, by supposing, that, since God has removed the dish, he has also been gracious enough to take away the appetite, And here, as I am well aware of the degeneracy of the times, and the general propensity to infidelity, I must be pardoned for a very short argument, in my opinion, more powerful than any that have been offered by Tillotson, Clark, Butler, and the other champions of christianity.

We see daily that stupidity, rage, love, hatred, and sometimes wit, brilliancy, and good fellowship may be acquired by drinking: Now, to alledge that it is more preposterous or absurd, to suppose that knowledge may be acquired by eating, appears to me perfect cavilling. Accordingly, those who delight in good eating are said emphatically, "Savoir vivre."

Women and flowers are held universally to be the same, and to be merely convertible terms; though indeed some of ruffian dispositions have looked upon them, not as flowers but as weeds, and treated them accordingly. Hence the poet:

You took her up a little tender flower,
Just sprouted on a bank, which the next frost
Had nipt.; and with a careful loving hand,
Transplanted her into your own fair garden,

)

Where the sun always shines ; There long she flourish'd,
 Grew sweet to sense, and lovely to the eye,
 'Till, at last, a cruel spoiler came,
 Cropt this fair rose, and ruffled all its sweetness,
 Then cast it like a loathsome weed away.

And the wife of the gloomy King of Terrors is expressly mentioned, by Milton, as being a flower.

———Not that fair field
 Of Enna, where Proserpine gathering flowers,
 Herself a fairer flower, by gloomy Dis
 Was gathered.

When Clymene pulled the branch of a tree, she wounded her own daughter, who called aloud to her:

Parce, precor, Mater, quæcunque est saucia clamat,
 Parce, precor : Nostrum laniatur in arbore corpus.

And Urban the Eighth, speaking of the encounter between Apollo and Daphne, represents him as shaking hands with the branch of a tree :

Quisquis amans sequitur sugitivæ gaudia formæ,
 Fronde manus implet, baccas vel carpit amaras.

And I have read of florists, although I cannot recollect where, who considered a bed of tulips as a collection of painted ladies. By the bye, if they are not the same, they are at least resemble each other so strongly, that in beds, either of them may be

enjoyed to the greatest perfection ; and when they are once plucked, once enjoyed, their beauty withers, and their value is greatly diminished.

But, to finish all controversy on this head, though the pride of individuals leads them to give themselves out as something higher than the vegetable tribe, listen to the unguarded confession which extremity of grief forces from the beautiful Malvina: "I was a lovely tree in thy presence, Oscar, with all my branches round me ; but thy death came like a blast from the desert, and laid my green head low. The spring returned with its showers, but no leaf of mine arose."

Neither can the male sex boast an exemption from the tribe of plants ; for a poet, to whom the stock-dove lent melancholly murmurs, and the owl dullness and solemnity, with the admirable talent of foreboding mischief, addressing himself to gentlemen flourishing in the gay scenes of life, says:

Ye well arrayed ! ye lillies of our land !

Ye lillies male ! who neither toil nor spin.

And we learn in Hudibras, that certain soils were formerly much infested with soldiers :

For soldiers heretofore did grow
In gardens, just as weeds do now.

That not only soldiers, but celebrated generals of antiquity, and persons of remarkable beauty; 'became flowers, is testified by Ovid, who informs us, that Ajax, Hyacinthus, and Narcissus, were converted into flowers; and that a whole race of people sprang from mushrooms, a fact confirmed by proverbial sayings to this day. For, when upstart people, sprung the Lord knows whence, make themselves considerable by the plunder of Indian Nabobs, or a German war, they are immediately termed a "mushroom family."

So univervally is it allowed that the human species are nothing but flowers, that, in speaking of either sex, when in the highest state of perfection, they are said to be in the "bloom" of youth and beauty.

On the same account, genealogists, when tracing a person's descent, have always recourse to "the tree of the family"; and the celebrated Blackstone, treating of so grave and important a subject as the laws of succession to the imperial crown of these realms, mentions the "root and branches of the royal family." Also, a political set among us, who dis-

tinguished themselves by their firm attachment to hereditary right, represent the death of Charles the First by a felled tree, and his three sons, as branches issuing from it, adorned with crowns. And the amorous monarch; when he fled before the Usurper, recollecting his near alliance to a venerable oak, took refuge in its arms ; and the oak, with uncorrupted fidelity, and inviolable secrecy, screened his Majesty from those who thirsted for his blood.

I must here obviate an objection which may occur to those who have not studied this question so minutely as I have done, namely, That man is not a flower, but rather a soil where flowers may grow. Accordingly, those gardeners of morality and instruction, called Professors, some of whom I have now the honour to address, talk of cultivating the mind, and being careful, that, in a rich luxuriant soil, weeds be not suffered to spring up and choak the seeds of virtue. But they are guilty of an oversight ; for the qualities and defects in the mind grow by ingrafting; thus, when we speak of a wicked man, we say, vicious principles are strongly ingrafted in him.

Having said so much, I hope my presumption will be pardoned, in expecting great applause for having

strengthened the cause of humility, by resting it on an entirely new and well grounded foundation ; namely, the baseness of our origin, our souls being Nothing, and ourselves ranking no higher in the class of beings than the vegetable tribe.

This I have demonstrated, if arguments drawn from our daily expressions, supported by the authority of many profane authors, who have studied nature in all her variety, and confirmed by the sanction of the holy scriptures, shall be held for demonstration.

I must entreat, that the candid, judicious, and learned reader will here take the trouble to reflect on the various theories and systems which he has perused in the different branches of natural and moral philosophy, of divinity, medicine, and (that I may not provoke by neglect the resentment of the men of law), of jurisprudence, whether the authors on this branch have complimented their works with the title of treatises, "*De jure naturæ et gentium*," or "*Commentaries on the laws of this or the other state*;" and in these ingenious compositions have gravely informed their readers, "*What sort of laws the Almighty might have prescribed to his creatures*;" or, when treating of the origin of property, they,

with admirable ingenuity and sagacity, explained,

The only true and solid foundation of man's dominion over external things:" I say, I entreat that he will reflect on the theories and systems with which he is most conversant, and determine with himself, whether nineteen out of twenty of them are not supported by more distant analogies, more trivial resemblances, and more futile arguments, and corroborated by less respectable authorities, and less applicable quotations, than those by which I have established the vegetable state of man.

It is time I should conclude this digression, by inquiring shortly into the origin of flowers, which will bring me precisely to my original subject. To trace their origin then to the golden age, which is the farthest I am able, I find

"Placidique tepentibus auris
Mulcebant zephyri natos sine semine flores."

Now, if flowers do not spring from the seed, it follows, that they spring from Nothing, that is to say, from the subject of this discourse. If a little wit may be pardoned in so grave a subject, I hope the flowers will present a grateful odour to those for

whom the nosegay is prepared, and, in the end, may adorn the brow of their father.



That you may understand the succeeding part of this treatise, it will be proper to give you a historical anecdote concerning our subject. In days of yore, there were two very great and powerful families, said to have been originally sprung from the same stock, which the similarity of their names seems to confirm. These were Something and Nothing. They are said to have been the issue of Plenty and Scarcity, who are the offspring of Industry and Idleness. These have not become extinct like most ancient families, but still flourish and overspread every corner of the earth.

An early family-feud sprung between them, arising from a natural diversity of qualities and dispositions, which soon grew to so extravagant a height, that they formally renounced all intercourse with each other. For instance, if any of the family of the Somethings followed the learned professions, to wit, if they became lawyers or physicians, and were consulted about any of my poor family when in distress, they declined to visit us, professed that we

were the object of their mortal aversion, and flatly refused to give advice for NOTHING. If, again, they were divines, still not a whit more charitable; they refused to pray for us, and always buzzed in our ears a favourite maxim of theirs, "That godliness was great gain." If merchants, they entered into a non-importation and non-exportation agreement against all our countrymen; yet we have been known to bite them severely in this article; they refused to buy or sell with us, and have been known, times without number, to let their goods rot in their warehouses, rather than barter them with any of our family. In short, they could not bear the sight of each other; and, whenever the one came into any company, the other immediately left it.

The inveterate feud between those ancient and powerful families, has been productive of the most important events, and surprising revolutions, although entirely overlooked by the shameful blindness of historians, even when they described the facts that occasioned them. It was this which produced the fierce contest between the fat and lean kine which disturbed the slumbers of Pharaoh. It was the irresistible force of our dreary empire, which required

the interposition of the divine arm scattering quails and manna, to save the Israelites from destruction.

To endure the presence of our subject, which is more pestilential than the breath of venomous Hydra, or to introduce the rival family in its stead, has afforded ample opportunity for exercising the most persuasive miracles, miracles the most pleasant of any, because they filled the bellies of believers ; the history of which is never read to the devout and hungry, without producing an earnest desire to see the experiment repeated.

It was the feud between those powerful families which occasioned that irruption of Nothern Barbarians which overwhelmed the Roman Empire. In short, scarce has the brazen trumpet sounded rival nations to arms, scarce has a sovereign stretched the rod of oppression over his hapless subjects, scarce has fraud and injustice been committed between man and man, but what arose from this irreconcilable difference between Something and Nothing. Nay, even when the seeds of war sprung from no sordid and avaricious motives, when nations fought for glory alone, still, with the utmost propriety, may they be said to have been fighting about NOTHING.

Now it must be observed, that there are certain parts and appannages of the human body, which have always found it exceedingly troublesome and dangerous to be possessed by the family of Nothing. Of these the chief are the brain, the belly, and the pocket. To describe the various ways in which Nothing obtains possession of the brain, would exceed the bounds of this discourse, and, besides, would pre-occupy a favourite work, which I intend soon to compose, being extremely well qualified for the undertaking, namely, a dissertation on Madness, with its causes remote and proximate, and its astonishing operations and effects; in which, as Doctor Young proved the love of fame to be the universal passion, so am I to demonstrate Madness to be the universal principle regulating mankind, and to show how intimately the passion and the principle are allied. Therefore I shall briefly observe, that there are certain sutures or openings in the heads of children, which require, at their birth, to be carefully and accurately put together by the midwife. Now, through the unskilfulness of female practitioners in the obstetric art, it frequently happens, that certain crannies are left in the skull, through which the

particles of the brain being fermented, the most refined part of the spirit flies off, and, besides dregs, Nothing remains. Another most powerful cause of madness, is a certain light, penetrating through those crannies, best known by the term Illumination, which dazzling the weak nerves whereon it is darted, like heaven's blessed beam, turns vinegar more sour, and produces absolute frenzy.

There is still another very potent cause of madness, to wit, the emptiness of the pocket; for, when Nothing is in the pocket, the brain becomes distracted at seeing its mortal enemy encamped so near it; upon which, deserting the garrison, it surrenders to Nothing. To show that the brains will not keep their post when Nothing is in the pocket, let me observe, that, in those constitutions, where, by the natural grossness of the materials, they cannot speedily evaporate, the owners of them, on discovering the dreadful calamity of an empty pocket, by a violent operation, blow out their brains at once, with assistance of a loaded pistol.

I must here expose the malevolence and injustice of a remark which has generally prevailed in most ages and nations, that a sordid ungenerous respect

is shewn to riches, which ought naturally to be paid to wisdom, benevolence, fortitude, and other such amiable qualities and dispositions; whereas it being established by long experience, that the brains are disordered when the pocket is empty, the state of the pocket has therefore been attended to by every judicious observer, as a thermometer for determining the heat of the brain; accordingly, as this thermometer rises or falls, respect or contempt follows the owner, as possessing or being destitute of every earthly qualification or blessing.

The connection between the pocket and the belly is so intimate, that whenever the belly discovers Nothing in the pocket, whereby its supply of ammunition being totally cut off, it is obliged to surrender for famine. Thus the prudent generals of the house of Nothing commonly begin their attack upon the pocket, being sure that, if it is reduced, the head and belly will surrender of course. But, as opposite causes frequently produce the same effects, it happens, on some occasions, that an overflowing pocket will produce as extravagant madness as ever proceeded from an empty one.

Among the most distinguished characters in which

my subject has appeared, besides those already mentioned, are the perpetuum mobile, the philosopher's stone, and the grand elixir ; things which never did, and never can exist in nature, except in its almighty parent alone. Nothing, under some of these disguises, for many centuries, occupied almost the whole learned world, and produced millions of volumes. It became the object of general attention under other appearances somewhat similar ; such as witchcraft, judicial astrology, and the mystical power of numbers ; on the last of which I must be indulged in a few words.

One would imagine that figures or numbers were in themselves as simple, innocent, and harmless beings as any whatever ; indeed they are things which have no positive existence in nature, but only are names or signs used to denote the relative quantity and proportion of things. Yet these philosophers conceived a strange mystical power in certain favourite numbers, which they imagined could operate very powerful effects on natural bodies.

Among the numbers which engaged the greatest list of votaries, Three, Seven, and Nine have borne the palm. The worshippers of Nine observe, that

there are nine Muses, nine daughters of Pierus, changed into chattering Magpies, nine orders of blessed angels, nine lives in a cat ; that children go nine months in their mothers belly ; and that Hell is nine times surrounded by the river Styx.

The worshippers of Seven observe, that there were seven wise Men ; seven Jewish Brethren fried to death by a cruel tyrant, because they would not eat bacon ; seven years that Nebuchadnezzar champed thistles on a common ; seven wonders of the world ; seven sleepers ; seven days of the week ; seven golden candlesticks ; seven states of Greece ; and the seven United Provinces.

But the worshippers of Three have been much more numerous than those of its rival numbers. They have boasted, that there are three Graces, three Infernal Furies, three Judges in Hell, three Sleeping witnesses of the transfiguration ; three distinct parts, composing the British Legislature, King, Lords, and Commons ; three grand enemies of our Constitution, the Pope, the Devil, and the Pretender ; three abodes of mankind, Heaven, Earth, and Hell ; three seats in the Play-house, the pit, the boxes, and the gallery ; three Cardinal virtues, Faith, Hope, and Charity ;

three adversaries of our salvation, the Flesh, the World, and the Devil; three powers of the mind, Imagination, Memory, and Judgment; three genders, Masculine, Feminine, and Neuter; three divisions of time, Past, Present, and to come; three divisions of matter, length, breadth, and thickness; three notations of quantity, weight, measure, and number; three inhabited elements, earth, air and sea; three senses.

I make no doubt but I shall here be accused of having suffered my arrogance to mount to a most extravagant pitch. Not satisfied with having represented almost every thing which is held to be important and sacred, as futile and trifling, I have dared from the little (I mean the few) senses that you have, to curtail almost a half. But, although I have to combat a prejudice which has been sanctified by the acquiescence of all ages and nations, I am hopeful I shall demonstrate, in very few words, that there are three senses alone, and that we may with equal justice assert, there are seven, eight, or any other number of senses, if we once admit more than three. There are then the senses of seeing, hearing, and feeling; for tasting, which has been

vulgarly reckoned a distinct sense, is nothing else than the flavour of an object, impressed upon the delicate papillæ of the tongue and palate ; and smelling is nothing more than the volatile effluvia exhaling from an object touching and impressing the olfactory nerves ; which, therefore, are both of them branches of the sense of feeling. Which sense, by the bye, if it must be parcelled out into branches, possesses infinitely more poignant sensations than those of taste and smell ; and which, therefore, may with much greater propriety challenge to themselves the rank of distinct senses. I submit with confidence, that there is a wider difference between being scorched by fire, and certain feelings which shall be nameless, than there is between the taste and smell of a dish of meat or bottle of wine ; yet these have been reckoned distinct senses, while those have been reputed branches of the same.

Having thus demonstrated, that there are only three senses, and also established the superiority of three above any other number, I will finish my remarks on this subject, by observing, that there are a certain people who have a strange hankering after number one. This, I presume arises from the

respect and complacency with which every person treats his own proper self ; and it has often been observed, that people have gratified this number, in trifling satisfactions, at the expence of the safety and prosperity of thousands. Therefore, having conceived an affection for number One, at the same time conscious of the undoubted sovereignty of number Three, they advance a doctrine which at first sight appears paradoxical, namely, that Three are no more than One, and that One is as many as Three ; which, however, is indisputably true, since three feet make no more than one yard, three groats than one shilling, and three taylors than one man ; and that one yard is equal to three feet, one shilling to three groats, and one man to three taylors.

If any of my learned hearers wish to attain the art of decyphering mystical numbers, I sincerely recommend him to peruse " Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of Saint John," which will unquestionably afford him sufficient matter for admiration, and which, I assure him, would be greatly injured by any quotation or excerpt whatever.

My subject may be viewed in one light which

renders it truly amiable, and that is, the great encouragement it gives to industry ; for Nothing is the daily employment, and also gives daily bread to many. That great numbers are daily employed about Nothing is evident ; and, upon accurate observation, it will be found that many more are employed about it than appears at first sight. Here it must be observed, that work may be simply done or performed, or it may be done to the purpose ; so there are some who do Nothing, and others who do Nothing to the purpose.

Now, let me ask, whether those persons who are hired to harangue at stated times in favour of truth, honesty, sobriety, charity, meekness, piety, fasting, and prayer ; whether those professors who are hired to lecture on different subjects to a parcel of giddy boys who do not attend to one word ; whether those quacks who invent medicines that cure all diseases which are incident to the human frame, and those who use the medicines so invented ; whether those who write Observations upon the prophecies of Thomas the Rhymer, and his prophetic brethren ; whether those swarms of authors with their retainers, printers, paper-makers, &c. who have published such

multitudes of volumes that are good for Nothing but snuff-paper, or still more ignoble purposes ; whether those lawyers who write cases to judges that never read them, and plead before judges who do not attend to a word they say ; whether again judges who are obliged to sit and hear lawyers, and those none of the oldest, speak on a subject, and that none of the most important, longer than I am confident it would take to rehearse the whole orations of Cicero that have been handed down to us : I say, whether all these are not employed about Nothing, or Nothing to the purpose ?

The pulpit was the theatre from which long speeches formerly were delivered ; but as the learning of the clergy and moderation of the people increased, they were so ill received, that they took up their station at the bar ; but with this difference, that, as from the pulpit they were listened to with the most heartfelt satisfaction, so from the bar they are received with disgust and contempt. For my part, I can compare them to Nothing but tedious wind.

Lastly, in imitation of those solemn orators who from one of the three wooden machines invented

for the convenience of that noble science, harangue against our favourite pleasures, like careful housewives flapping the flies from a pot of honey, I shall inform you where you will find the subject of this discourse ; only with this difference, that as these learned orators prudently set out with announcing the subject, lest their hearers should not be able to comprehend what they would be at, or on what they meant to declaim ; so I shall end where they begin, by declaring that the subject of this discourse will be found in a deaf nut, in which, when it is cracked, you will find NOTHING.

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